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A

WORD IN SEASON.

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A
WORD IN SEASON:

OR,

A CALL

TO

THE INHABITANTS OF GREAT BRITAIN,

TO STAND PREPARED FOR

THE CONSEQUENCES

OF

THE PRESENT WAR.

SECOND EDITION,

CORRECTED AND IMPROVED BY THE AUTHOR,

J. BICHENO,

AUTHOR OF THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES.

To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart.—DAVID.

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A

WORD IN SEASON, &c.

NEWBURY, Feb. 25, 1795.

MY DEAR COUNTRYMEN,

AS this day is set apart by high authority, for the purpose of “*humbling ourselves before Almighty God, and sending up our prayers and supplications to the Divine Majesty, for averting those heavy judgments which our manifold sins and provocations have justly deserved** ;” and as our humiliations, to have any good effect, must extend beyond this day, and consist in something more than the forms of devotion ; I hope that some hours of it will not be improperly employed in arranging, for the public attention, a few thoughts which appear calculated to convince us, that we are indeed deserving of those heavy judgments of which we are reminded, and evidently in great danger of soon experiencing them, especially if present measures be persisted in.

What is the part which the true servants of God, and the enlightened friends of their country, who

* See his Majesty's Proclamation.

B

seek not the honours of men, ought to act, in the solemn assemblies, this day? Is it to amuse their auditors with courtly panegyrics on the excellency and purity of our government in church and state, and the wisdom and virtue of those who manage the affairs of the nation? Is it, by virulent invectives against their neighbours, whose sentiments, about public measures, may differ from their own; and by eloquent harangues on the impieties and enormities of the French, to inflame men's passions, and stir up a spirit of ill-will among neighbours, and urge them to additional zeal in the destruction of their fellow-creatures? Is it to buoy up the delusive confidence of the people, by talking about the *wisdom, justice, and necessity* of this war in defence of *religion and regular governments*?—Surely not*. Their office is rather that which was enjoined on the prophet of old (Joel ii. 1.), *Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain; let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand.* By false alarms the nation has been betrayed into approbation of measures the most ruinous, and hurried into a war, which almost all wise and disinterested men now begin to think the most

* When our orators talk about *religion and regular governments*, and of the necessity of this War in their defence, what do they mean? We plain people understand them to mean such religion as has been destroyed in France; that religion, which a few years ago harassed, plundered, banished, or murdered near two millions of the French protestants: and which still maintains its ground at Rome, and thro' many extensive (we cannot say happy) countries. And, by *regular governments*, the general strain of their declamations leads us to conclude that they mean such as that perfected by Louis XIV. and those which still triumph in Russia and other countries where arbitrary power prevails. For this is the sort of religion and government which is destroyed in France. From such religions, and such regular governments, may all nations be delivered!—Grant us but liberty to worship God as we please, and we want no such goodly establishments, no such sacred priesthoods, as plunder and murder mankind for the good of their souls.

needless, impolitic, and dangerous, in which this country was ever engaged. The authors of such alarms deserve punishment; but there is an ALARM, which ought to be sounded from one end of the land to the other; in every city; in every town; in every dwelling; from the palace to the cottage. Let no one be esteemed either obtruding or arrogant, however feeble his voice, or however wanting in address, who, in the spirit of benevolence, attempts this duty. In times like the present, it is the duty of every one to contribute all in his power to the good of the community, and to exert himself to the utmost to awake his countrymen out of the dreadful lethargy into which they are sunk, and to arouse them to a proper sense of that imminent danger to which our country is exposed—A danger but little thought of, and less understood.

The times are peculiar; and our attention to what is passing about us ought to be regulated by the magnitude of the interests involved; and our seriousness proportioned to the awful appearance which the aspect of things has assumed. If it is not thus, we act neither as Christians nor as rational creatures. Let me then entreat my countrymen to lend me, for a few minutes, a patient hearing, whilst I call their attention to a subject made particularly interesting by the present situation of public affairs. If I found an ALARM when some would rather hear smooth things, "Peace, Peace, evil shall not come upon us, neither shall we see sword nor famine," proofs now are at hand to shew that an alarm is not sounded without reason. Let hypocrites and infidels mock; but let the wise prepare.

Although politics are not very becoming in general in pulpit-sermons, yet, I hope, I may be excused if something of that kind be here brought forward. Considering the subject, and the intent of it, it cannot well be otherwise. But the reader may rest as-

fured, that every thing will be rejected which shall not appear to comport with the dignity of religion, and with that seriousness which belongs to the subject we are going to discuss. He may also be assured, that nothing shall be said with a design to offend any one. But whilst we avoid railing accusations, and all bitterness and wrath, still let us not have men's persons in admiration; let us be faithful, and neither fear the frowns, nor court the smiles, of any. The times are too serious, and things too urgent, to flatter or trifle.

Nor let any think that it is unbecoming in a Christian to interest himself in, what are called, the politics of the world; or that it is dishonourable to religion to have reflections on national affairs mixed with its solemn subjects. This sentiment—so friendly to the ambitious views of those who wish to trample on the necks of their fellows, is entertained by many whose hearts are better than their heads. Such do not consider, how intimately connected religion and liberty are. Let liberty perish, and religion, which, even now, in this land, is too much degraded, by being made subservient to the views of mere worldlings, would soon be reduced to what it is in Portugal. Spain. Russia, and such regions of darkness and despotism; and its conscientious professors would have nothing to expect, but to be hunted as the lawful game of persecutors.

Christianity teaches us to bear sufferings with patience; but it does not forbid us to endeavour, by lawful means, either to avert them from us, when approaching, or to free ourselves from them, when upon us. And let us remember, that to exert ourselves, by all peaceable and lawful means, to avert evils from our country, and to protect freedom of inquiry after truth from violation, is a duty as much more obligatory than to guard *ourselves* from sufferings, as the interests of millions are superior to our

personal concerns, and as truth is more valuable than dust. What are a great part of the writings of the prophets but moral politics? With what faithfulness did they expose both moral and political abuses! and with what energy did they plead for their reformation! The less we have to do with the squabbles of *party* politicians, the better. We mean to take more holy ground—"Be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." Let us then remember that we are Christians, but not forget that we are men. Let us remember that our continuing country is in heaven, but not forget that we have a temporary interest in this, and that our children are to live after us. Let us bear in mind, that God worketh all things after the counsel of his own will; but yet, that this does not supersede our duties.—With these sentiments let us enter upon our subject.

The words which I shall recommend to your attention, as the foundation of this address, are those of Jesus Christ, recorded in *Luke* xxi. 36.

Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.

OUR Lord here leaves it in charge to his disciples, to watch for the fulfilment of those things of which he had been forewarning them, and to be constant in prayer, that they might be prepared for all events, and have the Almighty for their security.

Here then an interesting inquiry presents itself. *What* were the things of which Jesus Christ had been speaking, and *when* were they to be accomplished? Had he been speaking of the desolation of Jerusalem, and of the destruction of the Jewish polity only? If so, then this exhortation in the text was confined to the apostles and people of that age, and we, comparatively, have no interest in it. But had our Lord,

besides this, been predicting those calamities which were to afflict his church, and the nations in distant ages, and particularly those which are to prepare the way for, and to be the preludes to, his coming to assume that dominion, and glory, and kingdom, which is the gift of the *Ancient of Days*? (Dan. vii. 9—14.) If it be thus, then we are as much interested in what is here predicted, as the Apostles and Christians of that age were, and attention to this solemn exhortation becomes of infinite importance, and it is no longer an indifferent matter whether we have just or erroneous conceptions of what our great Lord and Master is treating. And as it is of unutterable importance to know of what Christ is speaking, so it is the indispensable duty of all Christians to pay the most unbounded respect to his injunctions. *Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.*

All these things. What things? It is generally agreed that our Lord, in this discourse to some of his disciples, speaks of what was to take place at the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, and of what was to come to pass in the last days, previous to the end of the world, or of the present dispensation and state of things; and that he marks out not only the signs which were to precede the overthrow of the Jewish state, but those which are to indicate the approach of the dissolution of all things. But though in this there is a pretty general agreement, yet there is a vast diversity of opinions as to what refers to the one period, and what to the other, and about where it is, that the transition is made from what concerns the destruction of Jerusalem to the events of the latter days. Mr. Mede, Archbishop Tillotson, and others, who stand high in the list of critics, think that it is at verse 25, where he speaks of the signs there should

be in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars. Dr. Doddridge conjectures, that the transition is made after the caution in the 24th and 25th verses, where he bids his disciples take heed, because that as *a snare that day shall come on all them that dwell on the face of the earth*, and that our text and the parallel passage in Matth. xxiv. 42. and all that follows, as related by Matthew, refers to the last times, the coming of the Lord to judgment. But though he thinks the transition is here, yet he maintains, that when our Lord says, *But of that day and of that hour knoweth no man, no not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father*, this cannot refer to the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, but to the end of the world, and yet these words, according to Mark, (and in his own harmony,) occupy a prior part of the discourse.

But there are other expositors who suppose a double meaning in these predictions, a *primary* and a *secondary*, and that our Lord speaks of the signs and calamities at the destruction of Jerusalem, as types of those which are to be in the latter times of the world; or that he intersperses predictions respecting the last day with those which were to be fulfilled in that age. This latter mode of interpretation, above all others, distracts and bewilders our thoughts, and is liable to very great objections. Some other interpretations are less exceptionable, but I acknowledge that I have never seen any thing on the subject which afforded me thorough satisfaction.

As it is of great consequence to our general design to establish the true meaning of this discourse, and especially of the latter part of it; and as it highly befits our character as Christians, to do the utmost we can, rightly to understand the instructions of our Lord and Master, that we may thus be better qualified to do his will, let us for a few minutes look over what is here written, and endeavour to judge for

ourselves, and may the Spirit of God be our instructor!

As both Matthew and Mark, as well as Luke, have taken notice of this famous discourse, it will be necessary to refer to them all, comparing their several accounts with each other. Matthew enters more largely into the subject than either Mark or Luke, for these latter have taken no notice of those three beautiful parables which are recorded in Matthew xxv. and with which our Lord concluded his predictions, and by which he illustrated and enforced what he had been teaching his disciples.

To the right understanding of these predictions of Jesus Christ, it is necessary to recollect a *prejudice* which occupied the disciples' minds, and the *questions* which he here condescends to answer. Matthew says, (xxiv. 3.) *As he sat upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, tell us, when shall these things be, and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world.* Mark informs us that these disciples were Peter, James, John, and Andrew.

A little before, as we read in the latter part of the twenty-third chapter of Matthew, and the former part of the twenty-fourth, the Son of God had been denouncing a woe on Jerusalem for the obstinacy of the Jews in impenitence and unbelief. He had denounced that they should not see him any more, till they should say, *Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord,* (chap. xxiii. 39.) that is, till that time prophesied of by *Ezekiel*, chap. xxxviii. by *Daniel*, chap. vii. and by *Zechariah*, chap. xiv. as well as by others of the prophets, when he will come to deliver Israel in their great extremity, and they shall look on him whom they pierced, and repent and believe. Other notable displays of his power and providence in the punishment of his enemies, and in the salvation of his Church, for the furtherance of the kingdom of God

among men, are called his *coming*, but this more emphatically. He had also declared to his disciples, that the time would come when there should not be left of the temple, one stone upon another that should not be cast down (xxiv. 2.)

They had long been possessed with an idea, in common with the rest of their countrymen, that when the Messiah should come, he would immediately set up a glorious kingdom, raise the Jewish nation above all people, and introduce that happy state of things, of which the Prophets had long spoken, and that righteousness, peace, and happiness, should take place of wickedness, war, and calamity; in short, that the curse should be taken from the earth, at least as it respected the seed of Abraham. These were their prejudices; but they would naturally conclude, from what their master had been saying respecting Jerusalem and the Temple, that some heavy judgment would fall upon the Scribes and Pharisees, the chief priests and elders, and the other obstinate enemies of Jesus, before this glorious and happy state of things should commence. But that it would *soon* commence, they had no doubt, and seemed disposed to believe it, even to the hour of Christ's ascension. Possessed with this idea, they asked him, saying, *Tell us, when shall these judgments, of which thou hast spoken, be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?* What is here rendered the end of the *world*, (συντελειας του αιωνος) some would render the end of the *age* or *dispensation*. This may be proper enough, but then what is the meaning of such a phrase? The end of the *age* or *dispensation* means the end of that state of things which is to continue till the dissolution of the kingdoms of the world, and the commencement of that of the Messiah in its glory, when a new *age* or *dispensation* is to commence. So that whichever rendering is adopted, the difference is very little; but *the end of*

the age. or dispensation, appears to be the most proper and apt.

The discourse of our Lord seems capable of being divided into three principal parts, and this if considered with attention, appears to afford an easy solution to the otherwise inexplicable difficulties of this interesting part of holy writ, about which our greatest commentators have been so much perplexed and divided. The former part may be considered as an introduction, and its design appears to have been, to free the minds of the disciples from that strong prejudice which possessed them respecting the speedy coming of the Messiah's kingdom; the speedy arrival of those happy days, of which the prophets speak in such rapturous language. Then follow predictions relative to the destruction of Jerusalem, the dissolution of the Jewish state, and the long and grievous captivity of that insatuated people. This is in answer to the question, *When shall these things be?* Then follows the answer to the inquiry, *What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?*

As *Matt. ew* has given the most ample account of this discourse let us briefly review his relation, and compare it with what *Mark* and *Luke* have written. See *Matth. xxiv.* When the disciples put these questions, and our Lord perceived in their minds that prejudice from which they originated, he set himself to inform them. that instead of that blessed state of which the prophets had spoken, coming so *soon* as they expected, there was to be a long interval, which would be filled up with woes and calamities. This part of the discourse continues from verse the 4th to verse the 14th inclusive. In *Mark* the *xiii.* it is from verse 5. to verse 13. In *Luke* *xxi.* it is from verse 8, to verse 20.

What our Lord here advances is applicable not only to the Jewish nation, but to them, the Christian Church, and the nations in general. Instead of that

universal prevalence of truth, and of that pure and undefiled religion which they were expecting, he lets them know, that numerous impostors would come in his name, and deceive many, (verse 5, and 11, of Matthew xxiv) that, instead of that state of uninterrupted peace and happiness with which they were flattering themselves, there would be wars, and famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes; and that not for a *short* period, for *the end is not yet*, (verse 6.) or as Luke has it, *The end is not by and by*. Hence, when they should see these calamities prevail in an extraordinary degree, as would soon be the case, even then they were not to expect the consummation of all things immediately to follow, for that there was to be a long state of suffering, (verse 3.) *For all these are the beginnings of sorrows*, for, instead of the meek inheriting the earth, they should be subjected to the most cruel persecutions, (verse 9.) *Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you, and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, &c.*

At the conclusion of this general representation of things, he adds, (verse 14.) *And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come*. Here he gives his people a decisive sign of the approaching end, by glancing at what he afterwards resumes in verse 31. where he speaks of sending his *angels*, or messengers, with *a great sound of a trumpet*, to gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other, which seems to be a prediction of the conversion of all nations in the latter days.

Having thus informed his disciples in a general way, that a long season of imposture, iniquity, persecution, and calamity, was to be expected, and not the immediate commencement of Messiah's peaceful and glorious kingdom, and having said what might be esteemed sufficient to remove their deep rooted prejudice on this head, he then sets himself to an-

swer, in a more particular way, the questions which they had put to him. And as their first question was, *When shall these things be?* that is, when should Jerusalem and the Temple be laid in heaps, as he had spoken? He first speaks to this point, and utters predictions which relate more immediately to Jewish affairs, and cautions his people how to act when desolation should overspread their country; informing them of certain signs by which they might know what was coming, and take measures for their safety. These predictions are related verse 15—28. In Mark xiii. verse 14—23. In Luke xxii. verse 20—23. And what is here said, appears to relate to the affairs of the Jewish nation, and to *nothing* beside.

With what precision the predictions here recorded were fulfilled, in the destruction of Jerusalem, and the total overthrow of the Jewish state and nation, the history of Josephus is an ample testimony.

But these predictions of our Lord were not confined to that era, but extend to the end of their present captivity, for according to Luke, xxi. 24. our Lord said, *They shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations, and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, till the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.* And what are the times of the Gentiles? Not, I apprehend, as Dr. Hurd and many others have supposed, the period allotted for their conversion. but rather as Mr. Mede has observed, the time till the end of those four monarchies represented to Nebuchadnezzar, under the figure of an image, whose brightness was excellent, and whose form was terrible: and to Daniel under the symbols of four ravenous beasts. The dominion of the last monarchy still exists in the ten toes of the image, and in the ten horns of the fourth beast: the states and kingdoms of Europe, into which the Roman *western** dominion has been broken. The end of

* The western part of the Roman empire constituted the body of the fourth beast; the eastern countries, which became subject to

the times of the Gentiles is, when these kingdoms of the world, so far as they are inimical to the kingdom of Christ, shall be overthrown, and give place to the dominion of him *whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and whose kingdom is that which shall not be destroyed*, Dan. vii. 14. It is not till these times of the Gentiles shall be fulfilled that Jerusalem is to be restored.

Here, again, our Lord cautions his disciples against being deceived by cheats and impostors respecting his coming, for that it shall be as the lightning which cometh from heaven, (verse 26—28.) conspicuous, sudden, and with irresistible power.

And now having spoken of the long and grievous captivity of the Jews, till the times of the Gentiles should be fulfilled, he passes on to the signs of his coming in the latter days for the purpose of setting up his glorious kingdom: and this may be considered as the *third* division of his discourse, and an answer to the question, *What shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world?*

Verse 29. *Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken; and then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn; or as Luke has it, There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon and in the stars, and upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring, mens hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken, and then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.*

Rome, or which otherwise lost their pre-eminence, belonged to the former *beasts*, and are considered as still existing after their superiority has given place to that of the *fourth beast*; for they are tyrannies still, though they have lost their dominion, and will continue to be so, till the coming of the kingdom of *Christ*. Dan. vii. 12. and 23.

What, according to the usual prophetic style, are we to understand by the terms here used? Are we to understand the darkening of the sun and moon; the falling of the stars; the sea and the waves roaring, and the shaking of the powers of heaven, &c. in a literal, or in a figurative sense? It is well known, that when the prophets speak of the convulsions of nations, the fall of the princes and rulers of the world; the calamities and dissolutions of empires, states and kingdoms, it is, generally, in such kind of language as this—A manner of speaking derived from the ancient hieroglyphics; a way of representing things by pictures, or symbols, on account of some real or imaginary likeness. A language which their countrymen well understood, and which, for its sublimity, was well fitted to the theme of prophecy.

Thus the heavens were the symbols of governments, the sun, moon, and stars, of princes and great men: the earth of the common people: clouds, and great collections of waters, of multitudes of people: thunder, hail, and tempest, and the agitation of the seas, of commotions and wars. As proofs of this, see Isaiah xiv. 13. xxix. 6. xxxiv. 4. Rev. vi. 12—17.

This then being the usual language which prophecy assumes, when those wars and commotions which dissolve governments, which throw down from their height of power and honour, the mighty of the earth, and involve nations in overwhelming calamities, are to be described, it is natural to suppose that the imagery here employed by our Lord, is the representation of such events.

But to what period does he refer? was all this accomplished in the destruction of Jerusalem, in the overthrow of the Jewish state, and by the fall of the Jewish rulers? or does it yet remain unfulfilled? It could not be at the time of the dissolution of the Jewish state, for it is said to be *immediately after those days*

of calamity which Jesus had been describing, and which calamities, according to Luke, are to continue *until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled*, that is, 'till that destruction of the states and kingdoms of the world, which is to take place in the latter days; and which is to make way for the restoration of the Jewish people from their long and wide dispersion. And that these signs in the heavens, and this distress of nations, of which Christ speaks, could not have their fulfilment in the fearful sights which are said to have appeared at the siege of Jerusalem, and in the prevailing distresses of that age, strange and great as they might be, but must refer to something yet to come, appears more evident from what Luke records (verse 28.), for he tells us that Christ added, *And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh*. Now, neither the redemption of the Jewish people from their captivity and sufferings, nor that of the Christian church from its oppressed state, could be said, with any propriety, to be then drawing nigh. so as to encourage the sufferers to lift up their heads with expectation of quick relief, for more than 1700 years are passed, and no such redemption has appeared. We may also observe, that these calamities, when the powers of heaven are to be shaken, are much more extensive than those of that day, which chiefly affected the Jewish nation. There is to be upon *the earth* distress of nations, and *all the tribes of the earth* are to mourn.

We must conclude then that our Lord refers to a time not yet arrived; to events which are not yet accomplished, and with which the gathering of the Jews, and the redemption of the Christian church, from its present state of corruption and depression, are to be closely united. What is here called the darkening of the sun and moon, the falling of the stars, and the shaking of the powers of heaven, seems

to be the same with what is described in *Iſa.* xxiv. and *three following chapters*, when the Lord is to make the earth empty and waste, and turn it upside down, and punish leviathan the piercing serpent, and slay the dragon that is in the sea, previous to the gathering of the outcasts of Israel. It appears to be a description, under other images, of the same overthrow of the kingdoms of the world which was shewn to Nebuchadnezzar (*Dan.* ii.), in his vision of the destruction of that image, which was a representation of the four great monarchies with which the fortunes of the church of God were to be especially united, and which were to succeed each other in their dominion, and prevail till the coming of the kingdom of the Messiah; in which vision he saw a stone cut out without hands, that smote the image upon his feet, that were of iron and clay (that is as is understood by the explanation of the angel, *verse* 41. the ten states and kingdoms which were to grow out of the dominion of the fourth monarchy, the Roman western empire), and break them to pieces. And the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth. This is the kingdom of Christ, which shall never be destroyed, but which, while it breaks in pieces all the kingdoms of the world that oppose it, shall stand for ever.

Daniel had a vision of this same overthrow of the kingdoms of the world, under the figure of the destruction of a beast with ten horns, which was slain, and his body destroyed and given to the burning flame, *Dan.* vii. 11. Joel also, and all the prophets, have spoken of these times, when the Lord will plead with all people, and command the sickle to be put in to reap the nations, *Joel.* iii. 13.

When all this shall be effected, and thus the great obstacles to Christ's kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy, be removed out of the way, then shall appear *the sign of the Son of Man in heaven*, *ver.* 31. And he

shall send his angels, (his messengers, for though this word generally signifies celestial spirits, who are often the messengers of God, yet the word is expressive of their office, not their nature,)—*He shall send his messengers with a great sound of a trumpet (the gospel trumpet) and gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.* Now the word of the Lord shall have free course and be glorified in the conversion of all nations. The craft of oppressors and persecutors being at an end, christianity shall at once resume its original charms, its progress, and its triumphs.

That the coming of the Lord may not be at a time when we are not expecting him, and consequently, not prepared, he has delineated these signs, that, comparing events with his word, his people may at that season, particularly, be waiting in readiness to receive him. *When ye shall see all these things, says Jesus, know that it is near, even at the door—Know that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.* That is, when after a long season of corruption, apostacy, and suffering, ye shall not only witness the usual commotions of nations; but shall see mighty kingdoms overturning; and those who, as the bright luminaries of mankind, have long shone in the political heavens, hurled from their exalted stations, and when these wonderful revolutions shall not be partial but general, and be followed by a singular change in the face of religion and the fortunes of the Jewish nation, then know that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand, and stand prepared for it.

What follows has been considered as forming a strong objection against applying these predictions of our Lord to the latter days, and the misinterpretation of which has been, I think, the principal occasion of those perplexities which pervade the interpretations of most of our commentators. Verse 34, (see also Mark xiii. 30. and Luke xxi. 32.) *Verily I say*

unto you, *this generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away.* When I came to these words, it struck me, that what is rendered *this generation*, must be capable of some other rendering. On examination, the phrase *γενεα αυτη* (this generation) appears to be very equivocal; it may mean not only this *age*, but this *nation, progeny, family, flock, or kindred*. In Gen. xliii. 7. and Numb. x. 30. what is rendered *kindred*, is in the LXX. *γενεα*. The meaning of our Lord, therefore, appears to have been, “*Though there are to be so many calamities, and although the Jewish people are to experience so great a share of them, and that for so long a time, yet, verily, I say unto you, this nation shall not perish till all be fulfilled, but shall be preserved a distinct people, and of the truth of this you may rest assured, for heaven and earth shall perish, but my word shall not fail of being fulfilled.*”

And that this is the meaning of these words of our Lord, was the opinion of the learned Mr. Mede, Dr. Sykes, and others of eminent name*. Now this interpretation being admitted, it obviates almost all the difficulty in understanding this interesting discourse of Jesus Christ.

Here our Lord subjoins a solemn charge to his followers, verse 34—36, of Luke xxi. *Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare (not thought of) shall it come upon all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye, therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape*

* See Mede's Works, p. 752. “The word *generation* is ambiguous, *γενεα* signifies not only *ætas*, but *gens, natio, progenies*, and so ought to be here taken, viz. *Gens Judæorum non interibit, usque dum omnia hæc implentur; the nation of the Jews should not perish, till all these things were fulfilled.*”

all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.

I hope I have not wearied your patience by taking up so much of your time in endeavouring to ascertain the true meaning of this interesting discourse of our common Lord and Saviour. I trust that you think with me, that these wonderful predictions are deserving of the most diligent and devout attention, and especially in the present day, when the anti-christian kingdom has experienced so terrible an assault (*no matter by whom*), and when the powers of heaven are shaking, and exhibiting the most fearful and unusual sights.

Prophecy, in general, is deserving of more attention than is given to it, even by men of piety and learning. That the deistical and profane should not only neglect, but ridicule, every thing of this kind, is not to be wondered at; but that professing Christians, and men of sense and seriousness (especially in times like the present) should treat prophecy as scarcely deserving their notice, is very extraordinary indeed. "What subject," as Dr. Rutherford observes, in his *View of Ancient History*, "can be more striking to a philosophical, or a pious mind, than the contemplation of a long line of prophecies concerning the ancient nations, whose annals have been recorded." And is it thus with respect to the prophecies in general, and the realization of them in ages past? Those, then, which issued from the lips of Jesus Christ certainly deserve distinguished respect; and the subject becomes vastly more interesting and affecting, if we ourselves are acting a part in the great drama, witness the scenes of the fulfilment of the divine predictions, and are able to ascertain, with any tolerable degree of precision, their instant progress. In prophecy we discern not the policy of

men, but the councils of God. We behold the Supreme Being himself opening the volume of his divine decrees, and disclosing futurity to the world. In their fulfilment we see the proofs of the Being and Providence of Him who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working; whose wisdom is infinite, and who is greatly to be feared. To delineate before hand the history of following ages, to mark the character and destiny of nations unborn, and to stretch over opulent cities and flourishing kingdoms *the line of confusion, and the plummet of emptiness*, demonstrates a prescience which fills the mind with devout astonishment. To witness scenes, delineated by the accurate pencil of inspiration, many ages before we were born, inspires the heart with the sublimest devotion, and excites an homage which, while it humbles sinful man in the dust, assimilates his feelings and pleasures to those of the superior intelligences before the throne of God.—*Who would not fear Thee, O King of Nations? for to Thee doth it appertain!*
 ——— But to return to our subject :

The latter part of this discourse of our Lord, where he speaks of the *signs to be in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars, &c.* appears evidently to refer to the calamities of the latter days, when the terrible judgments of God are to fall upon the nations as a punishment for their incorrigible continuance in wickedness, and obstinate support of systems of hypocrisy, war, and oppression; and which judgments will utterly extinguish all their splendour, dissolve all their systems, and reduce them to the extremest condition of affliction, preparatory to that happy state of things which, under the superior influence of the gospel, is to spring out of this general ruin of the kingdoms of the world: And which happy state of things is called *the kingdom of God, and of Christ*. Now it becomes us candidly and seriously to consider whether there be any reasons to suppose that these

judgments are already begun to be poured out. Come they will, some time or other, and it *may* be now. Why not? From the singular and awful appearance of things, it becomes us instantly to reflect on the part which we are acting, and to consider what our situation and prospects are.—If we are leagued with antichrist, and his fraternity of despots, for the support of tyranny and corruption, against the Providence of God, which has determined their overthrow, our ruin, unless we immediately withdraw ourselves and amend our doings, is inevitable.

Let us now, for a few moments, fix our meditations on this solemn charge of our Lord and Master Jesus Christ. *Watch ye therefore, and pray always; that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.* Happy will it be for those who shall be found on the side of the King of kings; on the side of truth and righteousness, and whose hearts shall not be vitiated and perverted by intemperance, and the love of this present world, which would make them forgetful of his promise, and dispose them rather to side with his enemies, with antichristian oppressors, than with him; happy will it be for those, whose pure minds shall be watching for the coming of the Lord, and who, as servants waiting for their master, shall be ready to receive him. They shall be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man. Not that every individual of the righteous will escape those sufferings which are here predicted, but, in general, there shall be a special providence to preserve the godly; the potsherds of the earth shall dash each other to pieces, but the good shall be secured; and whereas the weight of former woes has fallen on the Church, this last, which is to usher in the kingdom of God among men, shall spend its torrents of wrath on the heads of its enemies, and the enemies of Christ and his kingdom.

There are seasons which are peculiarly fitted to awaken us to thoughtfulness, and when it particularly becomes Christians to turn their attention to what our Lord is here enforcing: and good and wise men, in all ages, have ever thought that those spreading calamities, whether of war, famine, or pestilence, which afflict and desolate nations, ought to be considered as special warnings, to stir up all Christians to increasing watchfulness and prayer. I cannot help recollecting here some of those pious and animated exhortations to watchfulness and prayer, which several good men addressed to the Church of Christ, when, at the beginning of this century, wars afflicted so many nations of the earth.

Dr. Increase Mather, in his *Exhortations to Faith and Fervency in Prayer*, published in 1710, considered the wars and calamities which then prevailed, as a loud call to the church and the nations to watch and be ready. "The providence of God," says he, p. 87. "at this day, is calling us to prayer. Great things are doing in the world. Wonderful revolutions there have been in our days, and greater are expected. Are not the nations in travailing pains? We see the beginning of sorrows; are not the judgments of God abroad on the earth? The sword is devouring in many places, and in some the famine and pestilence. A vial is pouring upon the earth, and if we consider our state, does it not call for prayer? What frowns of heaven have been upon us! and so much the more should we be fervent in prayer as we see the day approaching, when the glorious prophecies and promises shall receive their accomplishment. We are assured that when the *sixth trumpet*, called also the *second woe*, has done its work, the *seventh trumpet*, called the *third woe*, will come quickly. Now there is reason to hope that the second woe is past, that is, that the Turk shall be no more such a plague to the apostate Christian world

as for ages past he has been. At the time when the *second woe* passeth away there is to be a great earthquake; in that earthquake, one of the ten kingdoms, over which antichrist has reigned, will fall. There is," says he, p. 97, "a great earthquake among the nations. May the kingdom of France be that *tenth part of the city* which shall fall! May we hear of a mighty revolution there! we shall then know that the kingdom of Christ is at hand." Thus he proceeds, showing the signs of those times, and urging them as arguments to prayer and watchfulness.

And did wise and good men think that the circumstances of those days urged upon Christians peculiar watchfulness and fervency in prayer? and are there any among us who can esteem exhortations to particular attention to these duties unseasonable at this time, especially if we have seen that fall of the *tenth part* of Babylon the great; that *mighty revolution* in France, which men of eminent piety and sagacity, many years ago, conjectured from the prophecies, would be the prelude to the kingdom of Christ, and when wars and commotions shake so many kingdoms and states to their very foundations, and when the face of things in Europe has so suddenly assumed so singular and awful an aspect? Surely not; it is at all times our duty to pray for the coming of the kingdom of God; for the prosperity of Zion; for the peace of our country; for the happiness of all nations of men, and particularly *for kings, and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.* Do we then entertain any faith in the promises respecting the kingdom of Christ, or have we any desire to see these promises fulfilled? Are we at all concerned for the welfare of our country? Do we feel for the general interests of mankind? It is our duty then, at such a time as this, to stir up ourselves and others to watch and pray with redoubled fervency; and, especially,

lest our Lord should come in a day when we look not for him, and in an hour that we are not aware of, and should cut us asunder, and appoint us our portion with hypocrites. For as a snare shall it come on all the earth; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn. O that we may hearken to the Lord's commandment! then shall our peace be as a river, and our righteousness as the waves of the sea. Then will God be our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. And though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, and though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof, we need not fear; for there is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of our God, and in the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High shall the servants of God be hid, until his indignation be passed.

Watch and pray always. What are we here commanded to watch and pray for? for the coming of the kingdom of God, and that we may be ready. Numerous are the promises respecting the coming of this kingdom. The kingdom under the whole heaven is to be his. It is as a grain of mustard seed, small in its beginning, but it is to grow and become a tree, whose branches are to shoot and spread to the ends of the earth, that all nations may take shelter under its shadow. All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn unto the Lord, and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before him. Then the house of Israel shall return and seek the Lord, and David their king, and the heathen shall be given for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession.

But previous to this happy and glorious state of things, Jesus Christ, as the anointed of his Father, is to come in his terrible judgments for the overthrow of his enemies, and the removal of all that which

standeth in the way and hindereth. Antichrist, and all his supporters, are to perish. All the kingdoms on earth, which stand in opposition to the kingdom of Christ, are to be broken in pieces and consumed. His enemies will be angry (Rev. xi. 18.), and muster all their forces to oppose his providence; and, as Joel expresses it (chap. iii.), they will beat their ploughshares into swords, and their pruning hooks into spears, and the weak will say, I am strong. But all their armies will be but as fields of corn to be cut down, and as grapes of the vineyard to be trodden in the wine-press of the fierce anger of the Lord. *And then shall it be known, when the work of judgment is consummated, that the Lord dwelleth in Zion.*

It becomes the disciples of Jesus Christ to exercise a lively faith in these promises, and to live in expectation of their fulfilment. Without this, the exhortation in the text will never be properly attended to. Without this, we shall be so far from watching and praying always, that we may be accounted worthy to escape all these things, and to stand before the Son of Man, that it is not to be expected but that our hearts will be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon us unawares. Then, what wonder, if, instead of being among his friends, we are leagued with his enemies, or, at best, asleep.

Watch ye always. Be wakeful, be attentive. Be as the good servant, who knowing not at what hour his lord will come, but constantly expecting him, is attentive to the discharge of his duty, diligently listening for his knock, that he may open the door immediately.

Our Lord censured the Sadducees and Pharisees, because they did not discern those signs of the times, which were sufficient to inform them about his character and pretensions. As these, compared with the writings of the prophets, would have been a

sufficient guide to them, in that day of Christ's humiliation, so we may be sure, that signs will not be wanting to announce, to the attentive observer, the near approach of his coming in his glory. The duty of all Christians is to watch them as they rise, and compare them with the infallible predictions of inspiration. *The words are shut up till the time of the end* as speaks the angel to Daniel) but then many are to run to and fro, and knowledge is to be increased. *None of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand.*

But is it the duty of *all* Christians to watch and observe the appearance of those signs which our Lord has pointed out as the forerunners of the consummation of all things? This seems to be in a peculiar manner the duty of christian ministers. They are especially the Lord's watch-men, and he expects of them, particularly, that they be on the look-out, that they may see the signs of their Lord's coming, and give the people warning. If they do this, they will deliver their own souls, whether the people will take warning or not; but if they sleep, or seeing the sword, blow not the trumpet, blood will be required at their hands.

That the time is long, or that many have been deceived, is neither a sufficient reason to excuse our neglect, nor a just occasion for discouragement. Christ has promised to come, and commanded us to watch and pray always for it. This is enough. But whence is it that so many have been disappointed, and that they have disappointed others? It has been from mistaking the signs which our Lord has specified. It has been taken for granted, (and chiefly from misunderstanding the relation of the several parts of this discourse) that wars and rumours of wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes, simply considered, are to be the signs of the Lord's approach. The political heavens pouring out their

storms upon the earth, and the mere gliding of fiery meteors, have been mistaken for the signs of the coming of the Lord. But he has suggested no such thing. These were what were to fill up the interval from his ascension to his coming in his glory, (Luke xxi. 9.) The commotions which are to be considered as the signs of his kingdom being near at hand, are to be different from all others that have ever been. It will be next to impossible for the attentive christian to mistake them. It is not only that there are to be storms and tempests, and that the political heavens are to pour out their wrath upon the earth; or that their angry clouds are to dash and conflict as usual; but the powers of heaven themselves are to be shaken, dissolved, and pass away; and the great luminaries thereof, are to fall and be extinguished. These will be signs which will not be easily mistaken. Whilst then we guard against precipitance, let us beware of inattention and unfaithfulness. *Watch always.*

But this is not all that the duty of watching includes.

We shall watch the signs of the times to very little advantage, if, whilst we do this, we do not, at the same time, watch over ourselves. This duty belongs to *nations* and to *individuals*. Let nations be vigilant in examining into their moral and political defects; and in earnest to reform them. Is there any thing in their laws, constitutions, and governments, which dishonours God; which violates conscience; which oppresses the subject; which grinds the poor; which cherishes a disposition to war, or which in any way promotes injury and bloodshed? "Wash ye, make ye clean, put away the evil of your doings, before mine eyes, saith the Lord, cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." As no one can have the hardiness to say,

before Him that knoweth all things, that he has not much to repent of, and reform, much which deserves punishment from the righteous judge of all ; so, if our sentiments are regulated by the holy and benevolent principles of christianity, and not by the corrupt maxims of the world, we must acknowledge that, as a nation, we have much to repent of and reform ; much which cries aloud for the rod of God's anger. Alas ! What dissipation and luxury ; what bribery and corruption ; what irreligion and profaneness, pervades all ranks and degrees of men amongst us ! We are full and forget God, " Whoredom and wine take away the heart." Whilst the generality of the rich riot in their abundance, and are tyrannical, cruel, and oppressive ; the majority of the poor are either idle and profligate, and disposed to support themselves by fraud and rapine, or are sinking under the weight of their calamities, strangers to the influence both of religion and the social virtues : And as to the middle ranks of life, where the greatest share of virtue and piety has ever been to be found, how much are they infected with the follies and vices of the two extremes ! The hearts of most are overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life. True, our " merchants are princes, and our traffickers the honourable of the earth ;" they possess the riches and partake the pride of these, but " they have falsified the balances by deceit ;" they participate in the mean vices of the poor. Nor is this all. Our prophets commit adultery and walk in lies, they strengthen the hands of evil doers, that none doth return from his wickedness."—How great is our pride and insolence as a nation ! How ready to plunge into all the horrors of war upon the most trivial occasions ! How little do we care for the miseries of mankind ! War has never been at our doors, nor rapine laid our country waste, and therefore our hearts are hardened

against the sufferings of our fellow men. Our shouts of joy for thousands slain, and for cities laid in ruins, have entered into the ears of the father of mercies! What devastation, slaughter, and death, has our pride and avarice united, carried from one end of the earth to the other!

But let us fix our attention for a few minutes on five or six of those crimes, which, in the most proper sense, may be styled *national*; and the enormity of every one of which (though most of them are but little thought of) is enough to make us tremble for our fate, lest a double portion of that cup which is going round to the nations, should be apportioned to us.

The author of *An estimate of the manners and principles of the times*, who wrote forty years ago, enumerating the few national virtues which then remained, was able to muster *three*; “the spirit of liberty, the spirit of humanity, and the pure administration of justice.” As the spirit of liberty then continued to exist, though, as the author observes, not in all its vigour; so now, though much palsied, it is not quite extinct. And as to the administration of justice, the issue of the late state trials has served to strengthen our opinion that the situation of the people of this country, with all their grievances, may well be envied by many neighbouring nations; and that we ought to be as prudent in all our attempts for the restoration of our injured constitution to its true principles, as zealous in our exertions to disappoint the machinations of its enemies by a timely reform. But when the author bestows such unqualified praise on the humanity of the nation, he must have forgot that such a system of outrage, oppression, and murder, subsisted as the *slave trade*.

Let us begin our examination into our national crimes, by considering this traffic in the flesh and

blood of our fellow creatures, which is sanctioned by the laws of the land. Can any man of justice and humanity think of it without horror; “if you are justly shocked” (says a preacher on the last fast,) “by what you hear of the cruelties practised in France, you would perhaps be shocked much more if you could fully conceive of the evils and miseries inseparable from this traffic, which, I apprehend, not from hearsay, but from my own observation, are equal in atrocity, and perhaps superior in number in a single year to any, or all the worst actions which have been known in France since the commencement of their revolution.” Is it thus? And is one half of the evidence on this subject, which has been given before the privy council and the house of commons, true? From whence then is it that we can, with an unblushing face, be constantly haranguing about French cruelty and irreligion? Whence is it that we flatter ourselves with ultimate success in this hitherto calamitous war, because our enemies are so wicked?

Some attempts indeed have been made to suppress this iniquitous and bloody traffic. A momentary compunction seized the people, and a number of petitions were presented to the legislature, praying that an end might be put to it. The public have been amused with what parliament calls a *gradual* abolition. The bill is sent to the lords; they have sat four days in a session to examine evidence on a self-evident subject. It has been moved to defer the business from week to week, and year to year.—But the nation sleeps. We have eased our consciences, and are contented to leave the matter with rulers, without any farther efforts to quicken them in their duty. Ah, my countrymen! awake from your slumbers—It is the voice of God—“What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother’s blood crieth to me from the ground!”—When ye make many prayers I

will not hear; your hands are full of blood!"—The French have let the oppressed go free, by emancipating, at once, all their slaves. What wonder, seeing that we refuse to do it, if Providence should make use of them to break the heavy yoke from off the necks of those whom we hold in bondage, by delivering into their hands all our West India possessions, and thus accelerate the ruin of the British empire?

There is another national crime, but too little thought of, and which prejudice and long use have disposed the generality to esteem, not only as *not very* criminal, but as *essentially* proper. I refer to *church patronage*. True, we have worn the yoke till we do not feel it: but our insensibility is our crime. Impose on us an apothecary, an attorney, a shoemaker, a shoe-black, and we should all think ourselves oppressed, and complain aloud, and that justly; but our spiritual interest is esteemed as nothing. Almost every parish is robbed of the natural right of choosing its own pastor. Numbers are in the gift of the Lord Chancellor—a plentiful source of influence! Multitudes are in the gift of our gentry, male and female, who buy and sell them as any other property, and thus transfer to any, who have money to purchase, the dearest concerns of the consciences and souls of men, and this with as little scrupulosity as they sell their cattle. Some are in the gift of our bishops, colleges, and chapters; but let the presentation be lodged wherever it may, to the exclusion of the choice of the people, still men are robbed of their dearest and most important right, the right of choosing their own instructors in things which belong to their eternal salvation, and are obliged to receive and pay him who is imposed upon them, however unfit for the office of a spiritual guide. Here a wide door is opened for filling our churches with the most dangerous of hypocrites, with men who are a disgrace to their profession: who have no object but

the floece; who have no pretensions but their interest with the patron; who care nothing for the people; who disgrace Christianity; hinder, instead of forwarding, moral improvement, and occasion the growth of irreligion and infidelity. This is one of the chief evils which has retarded the progress of Christianity. Assuming an *imposing power in the church* constitutes the life and soul of antichrist; it becomes us, therefore, dispassionately to inquire whether, or not, we have thus long retained one of the principal characteristics of that monster which we should do well to get rid of?

It is in vain that we seek for the justification of ecclesiastical patronage in ancient practice; that we trace its authority to the *novels of Justinian*, or to the times of *Constantine*. It is neither of Christ, nor of reason. This, and many other corruptions of the like nature, God, in his righteous judgment, was pleased to permit in the times of darkness, as a punishment on the world for not receiving the love of the truth. But neither the moral nor the political evils of this practice are the less for this permission. Its tendency is to introduce and keep up an ignorant, idle, and ungodly ministry. It is of the same stock with feudal superiority and vassalage; and as much more criminal than that system of tyranny, as domination over men, in their spiritual and eternal concerns, is a more daring encroachment on the prerogatives of God, than assuming despotic controul over their bodies and civil interests. Thus the most corrupt and wicked of mankind (if not declared papists) have the power of dictating in the church of God, in a matter of the utmost importance to the interests of Christianity; to the instruction of the ignorant; the comfort of the afflicted, and the credit of religion. Not only did many of the pious reformers complain heavily of this bondage, but even that most corrupt assembly, the council of Trent, was o-

bliged to acknowledge the injury it occasioned. The interested, the prejudiced, and the carelets, may think as they please on this head; they may think that these sentiments are dictated by weakness, and worthy only of an enthusiast; but the wisest and best men that have lived, both in the established church and out of it, have ever looked upon this power of imposing pastors on the church as a great evil that must, in the end, bring ruin upon the communities which sanction and practise it.

The next national sin which I shall call to your recollection is *the gross prostitution of the sacrament of the Lord's supper*, by converting it into a qualification for the holding of civil and military offices. It is an impious profanation of one of the most solemn ordinances of the Christian religion. Is Christianity from heaven, or is it only of human invention, fit to be converted into an engine of state, and an instrument of oppression? The command of Jesus Christ is, "Do this in remembrance of me." When we attend upon this Christian institution, it should be to remember the death of the Messiah, and to shew it forth; it should be to express our faith in him, as our Lord and Saviour, and our devotion to his service. Its design is purely of a religious nature. The objects to which it directs our minds are altogether spiritual; redemption through the blood of Christ; the forgiveness of sins; the way of peace with God; the hope of eternal life. The requisite qualifications are faith and repentance, and it is declared that "Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord: For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh condemnation to himself." This is the doctrine of the New Testament, which we profess to reverence as from God. But what says the law of this country? I say of *this* country, for in no other in

the world is it prostituted as here.—Our law commands this sacrament to be taken for purposes very foreign from the original design; some of them are extremely ridiculous, and all of them worldly. It is made a qualification for gauging beer-barrels and soap boilers; for directing the commercial concerns of trading companies: in a word, for holding any civil or military office of honour, trust, or profit, under the government of Great Britain. And all this to serve the interests of a party. Thus religion is degraded, and that ordinance, which was, among other things, intended to be a mean of the communion of saints, is converted into an instrument of uncharitableness and disunion. Thus (as a worthy minister of the established church has expressed it) “we frequently see professed infidels and notorious libertines approach the Lord’s table as a matter of course, and prostitute the most solemn ordinance of Christianity to their ambition and interest. The great number and variety of appointments, civil and military, which cannot be legally possessed without this qualification, render the enormity almost as common as it is heinous. If the Lord be a God of knowledge, he cannot be deceived; if he be a God of truth and holiness, he will not be mocked. I am afraid we have been long guilty of the contemptuous profanation of the body and blood of Christ.”

Another national sin to be repented of and reformed, or, on account of which, we must expect the marks of God’s anger, is *perjury*. Though that profane cursing and swearing, which so much abounds in this land, and which so disgraces common conversation, is a grievous crime, and serves much to increase the aggregate of our national guilt, and may well fill us with painful apprehensions; yet there is another sort of swearing which may more properly be styled a *national sin*. How inconsiderately, and how needlessly, are oaths multiplied! The Eternal

is appealed to upon the most trivial occasions; and, if we are to give credit to accounts from custom-houses, excise-offices, &c. in many cases wherein, to say the least, it is next to impossible not to be imposed. "*A custom-house oath*" is proverbial for that which means nothing. Besides this, with what hurry, carelessness, and trifling, are oaths administered on the most solemn occasions! How irreverently taken; and with what little scrupulosity broken! "*Because of swearing the land mourneth.*"

And shall we leave unnoticed that alienation from the genuine principles of the reformation which so much prevails among protestants in general, and in this country in particular? It is I think to be reckoned among our great national sins. To say nothing of the poor and uninformed, whose want of any fixed principles on this head is, in a great measure, to be charged to the account of their teachers, how large a portion of our clergy, and what multitudes of the laity among the higher ranks, are there who seem to think nothing more of religion than as it is an establishment in different countries? Hence it is that we hear so much from our pulpits, from the treasury bench, and from other quarters, about the impiety and sacrilege of the French (styled by our bishops, "*Apostates from the truth*") in overturning the altars of religion, destroying venerable institutions, and seizing those sacred riches which the piety of ages had devoted to holy uses!—Hence it is that protestants think that they do well to pursue measures which, if either the dictates of scripture, of reason, or of our established church, are to be regarded, are pregnant with the most awful ruin: measures which every genuine and enlightened friend of christianity, of protestantism, of liberty, of our king and country, must deprecate as the most mad, injurious, and impious. And whence can it be but from ignorance of the first principles of protestant-

ism, and of the inspired denunciations against the whore of Babylon and her allies; or from an utter dereliction from the former and disbelief of the latter, that almost all can bear without concern, and many with satisfaction, of treaties for the defence of *all* Italy; and of English soldiers being stationed at Rome as a body-guard to the pope?—(I do not avouch for the truth of the fact)—Whence else can it be that so many, instead of expressing either grief or surprise, seem rather to glory in the honours of their country, when they read in the public prints, of the return of a detachment of dragoons from that post of special honour, adorned with all the distinctions which his holiness could confer; and not only displaying colours consecrated by the pontifical benediction; but bearing medals glittering with a legend dictated by infallibility, “Rome saved by British cannon?”—Is this all true? Or is it an invention by which to feel the pulse of the nation? In either case the temper of the times is manifested, and the conclusion is the same. Inspiration has said, (Rev. xviii. 4.) “Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues, for her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities;” but we have learned heroically to despise the warning, and seem willing to abide by the consequence of supporting the holy, apostolical, popish church, or what our betters call *Religion!*—*The Truth!!*

The giving and taking of *bribes* is another of our national sins, and the progress of which is alarming. It has already made great advances in sapping the foundation of our liberties; and threatens the entire destruction of all that is good in our constitution and government.

The love of bribes is not, as might be supposed, confined to the lower and baser sort of people, whose poverty and mean education might be pleaded (if

any thing could be pleaded) as some excuse for their deviation from the path of honour and virtue ; but it prevails through every gradation of the social scale : neither priest nor people are free ; no department, no rank, no fortune, is secure from the foul contamination. Who has not heard of that system of bribery practised at elections, and of that ascendancy which the cabinet obtains over every district of the land, by means of places, pensions, contracts, and a long et cætera of means of corruption ? Who has not had opportunities of witnessing, or hearing of those venales and frauds of office, by which immense fortunes are rapidly accumulated by the unworthiest characters ? We should not, perhaps, exaggerate the matter, if we were to say that our taxes are several millions a year more than would be necessary to support the best government, in virtuous hands, over a virtuous people. Hence our gracious sovereign every time he meets his parliament, is constrained to lament the heavy burdens which lie upon his people. Heavy indeed ! and if sympathy obliges him to lament them, how severely must we feel them ! Whence the evil originates, and who the chief occasion of our present sufferings and impending dangers are, it is not hard to determine. Bribery and corruption are at the root of all our grievances, and it is a sure mark of the great degree of depravity to which this nation is arrived, and a fatal symptom of what awaits us, when we not only see the greater part of the people witnessing this corruption with the most calm indifference, but hear multitudes pleading for it under the softened appellation of *necessary influence* ; or if they complain of the consequences, when they perceive them to affect themselves, yet approve the principle, and only repine that they cannot share in the depredation. How few are they who, if they had an opportunity, would not join to betray the cause of liberty, and sell their

country for gold! "A gift blindeth the wise." And is there nothing, from the prevalence of this vice, to excite in us any painful tears? It doubtless works its own punishment; but let us not forget the providence of God, which directs all causes to their effects, all means to their ends. Was the prophet commissioned to say to God's favoured nation, (Micah iii 10—12.) "They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity. The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money; yet will they lean upon the Lord, and say, Is not the Lord among us? None evil can come upon us. Therefore shall Zion, for your sake, be ploughed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest!" What right then have we to expect a continuance of prosperity, if we imitate their crimes? Shall the order of the divine government be violated in favour of our presumption? No. "Fire shall consume the tabernacles of bribery."

We might enter into the consideration of a great many more enormous vices, which must be considered, not only as the crimes of individuals, but, in the properest sense, as *national* sins; but I am afraid of provoking your impatience, when it is so necessary to conciliate your attention: yet seeing that examination into our national errors is so important a part of this watchfulness which our Lord enjoins, and so essential to our escaping the divine judgments, let us not omit to examine whether our national guilt be, or be not, increased, by our engaging in this present war.

That this nation has ever been too apt to plunge itself into wars, and too obstinate in lengthening them out, is a truth which cannot well be controverted*.

* Out of the ninety-four years which have passed of this century, this country has spent forty-one in war; expended about four hun-

And if credible testimony is to be regarded, our pride, and assuming domineering conduct, has made many of the surrounding nations, besides the French, wish for the day of our humiliation.—But, though this may be the case, yet seeing that almost all the powers of Europe are now engaged in the same cause with ourselves. the conquest of France, and the restoration of monarchy and religion * there, may not this be assumed in proof of the justness of our cause in the present contest? At any rate we may expect, at the bar of our neighbours, to be acquitted of all criminality.—This may satisfy the consciences of corrupt politicians; but let us remember that the number of offenders, however great, cannot alter the nature of things, and convert crimes into virtues; nor forget that there is a higher tribunal, to which nations are accountable, than the concert of princes at Pilnitz; and that it therefore becomes us to examine our ways, and see that we do not fill up the measure of our guilt by running with the multitude to do evil.

Before we take another step in this calamitous war, it becomes us seriously to inquire whether there were sufficient reasons to justify our entering into it; or, having proceeded thus far, whether it is *becoming, wise, and safe*, in opposition to all the singular rebukes of Providence which we have experienced, and in spite of the disasters which threaten us on every side, to persist in the prosecution of it, and to provoke additional fury by needless abuse, and by resolutions against negotiation?

dred and twenty millions of money; and incurred a debt of near three hundred millions.

* We are said to be fighting for religion. For what religion? Christianity or Popery? Popery may be restored, as it was first established, by the sword; but the religion of Jesus Christ calls for other weapons than those which are carnal. Its Founder has testified, that “all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.”

When the French nation, unable any longer to support the persecutions and oppressions of their old despotic government*, resolved on a revolution, did we view its progress with an evil eye, fearing lest the diffusion of liberty and happiness should affect our commercial interests; as though we would rather that popery and despotism should bind all nations in everlasting bondage, than any should share in our prosperity? It must indeed be allowed, that many rejoiced in the pleasing prospect which that event opened to the eye of humanity, but it is also true, I believe, that multitudes of our commercial men repined at it. Is the indulgence of such a spirit worthy of Christians? Is it not to proclaim to the world that our avarice, our rage for commerce, has eradicated from our minds every generous sentiment, and rendered us unworthy of liberty?—When France was rent by internal commotions, and powerfully attacked by its execrable neighbours, and hence supposed to be unable to afford succour to its foreign dependencies, did thousands then look forward to a rupture with avidity, as to an event which would throw all their East and West India possessions into our hands, and open to us new sources, at little hazard and expence, for the gratification of our favourite passion? How wicked! And is this passion for commerce, this avidity after wealth, as a mean for the gratification of our pride and luxury, become the all-inspiring spirit which pervades and animates this nation? Has it already plundered every corner of the globe; converted the once peaceful and fertile shores of Africa into a theatre of crimes, or a habitation for wild beasts; deluged the East with the blood of millions, and nearly extirpated all the original inhabitants of the West? And is it ne-

* Some samples of the oppression, civil and religious, of the old French government, may be seen in the *First Part. of the Signs of the Times.*

ver to be stopped in its career, till it has engrossed, for our gratification, all the treasures of nature, and humbled, or extirpated, all the nations of the earth which refuse to sacrifice to our pride, avarice, and luxury? It does not require the spirit of prophecy to foretel what awaits us, without repentance. Our vices are such, if we may reason from analogy and facts, as render miracles unnecessary, not only for our chastisement, but for our destruction. Yet what wonder, if, to hasten our catastrophe, He, who from the heavens beholds the ways of men, and bringeth the devices of the wicked to nought, should in judgment, "make our counsellors mad, turn our wise men backward, and make their knowledge foolish."—But to pursue our inquiries.

When the King of the French was accused of breaking the oath which he had once and again voluntarily taken to maintain the new constitution;—when he was accused of attempting to restore himself to his old arbitrary power, and, as a means of forwarding his supposed treacherous enterprize, of playing into the hands of the enemy, and of encouraging the invasion of his country; and, being pronounced guilty, was brought to the scaffold (though we might pity his misfortunes, or even think him treated with injustice and cruelty, yet), was it right and just in the sight of God, to join in a combination, with German tyrants, to plunge all Europe into the horrors of war, and sacrifice, not only millions of money, but the happiness and lives of millions of our fellow-creatures, for the sake of one man, or to avenge the quarrel of royalty?—When weary of the crimes of their old monarchy (the outrages of which, under one dynasty, they had endured for eight centuries), and suspicious of monarchy under every modification, they determined to adopt a representative form of government, and try whether that would not be more conducive to the na-

tional happiness (whether they were right or wrong has nothing to do with the question; did this nation act worthy of its character, to join itself in a combination with despotic and popish princes, with whom the restoration of the old absolute monarchy, and of the former state of things in religion, was the *sine qua non* of peace*? For whatever we may say about the *Scheldt* and the defence of our ally the *Dutch* (who never asked or wished for our interference,) was not this to commit ourselves, in violation of all the principles of our constitution and religion, as the champions of tyranny and popery?—When famine threatened them, was it politic or just, contrary to a subsisting treaty, to prohibit our merchants from supplying them with corn, (and them alone) whilst they were permitted to supply their enemies? Was not this a manifestation of the most hostile intentions, and to provoke war? Did we order their ambassador, with every circumstance of insult, to quit this country? And when an extraordinary deputy was sent to endeavour to preserve our neutrality, was he refused a hearing, and commanded instantly to depart the kingdom? When, by giving to our court such an interpretation of their decree of fraternization as might explain away what had occasioned offence, they endeavoured to prevent a rupture, did our ministry repel every attempt at accommodation, and treat the infant republic with all the contempt in their power? At whose door does the guilt of the war lie?—This nation was justly offended at the unqualified generality of the decree of fraternization, Nov. 19, 1792; but the explanation which was offered to qualify that decree

* On the 5th of April, 1793, the Prince of Saxe Cobourg published a manifesto in favour of the constitution of 1789, 90, and 91; but, four days afterwards, his superiors obliged him to revoke that manifesto, by publishing their disavowal of it. This forms a complete proof of the intentions of our confederates.

ought to have been accepted as an *amende honorable*, and thus all the miseries and calamities of war would have been prevented; but as if our pride had intoxicated us with ideas of our omnipotence, and as tho' resolved on war at any rate, we spurned all explanation, all concession; and then, because the French did not stand still to give us time to attack them to advantage, we suffered ourselves to be persuaded by those who had the effrontery to assert it, that they commenced against us an *unprovoked* war, and that we were *forced* to take up arms for self-defence. If we are deceived, is it not because we wish to be deceived? *

* “ France could not have any interest in disturbing the peace of any of their neighbours. When the states of Brabant, by their plenipotentiary M. Vandernoor, requested the assistance of France in support of their claims of emancipation from the dominion of the emperor, the National Assembly totally refused all aid and interference. It was not till after the year 1791, when the emperor Leopold began to negotiate a general confederacy of the powers of Europe against the new constitution of France, the National Assembly took up with rage, the cause of Belgic liberty.

“ Nor was it till they saw this country preparing for war, nor till we had broken the commercial treaty by stopping their ships, nor till we had dismissed their ambassadors with every mark of indignity, refusing to hear them; nor till the ministry and their party poured forth torrents of abuse, and manifested a determined hostility; it was not till after this, that they declared war.

“ Confederacies of European powers were formed for the destruction of the new constitution of France, and for the partition of its territory long before any hostile preparations on the part of France. The treaty of Pavia was on the 6th of July 1791; the convention of Pilnitz on the 26th of August 1791, and various other preparatory treaties on the part of the sovereigns of Europe were formed in the year 1791. Of all these matters, explanations were demanded on the part of France and refused by the combined powers, and (according to the customs of nations,) France declared war upon the refusal of various necessary explanations, such as the cause of armaments by the combined powers; the coalition with the French emigrants; supplying them with arms, &c.—France did not declare war against the emperor till April 1792. Their forbearance was more than is common. Their promptitude of defence was not to be compared to that of our ministry in 1756, when 2500 seamen were taken from the French before the declaration of war.”—*Hartley's Argument on the French Revolution.*

But besides all this, have we suffered ourselves, by misrepresentations of facts, and by false alarms, excited by interested men, to be worked up into such a frenzy of resentment, as not only to be unconcerned for all the blood and misery which marks the progress of this horrible war; but to hazard all our liberties, and even our political existence for the gratification of our passions, in the subjugation or extirpation of the French? If it be thus, great is our guilt, and we have reason to fear lest providence should cause the meditated mischief to recoil upon ourselves. O that our immediate repentance may prevent this! But alas! nothing but despair seems to present itself; though opportunity after opportunity has offered, when, with the best grace imaginable, we might have made advances towards peace, and become the arbiters of Europe, the friends, and not the scourge of our kind; yet we have scorned it away. France at this moment, (even though she returns abuse for abuse,) by the system of moderation which she has adopted, and the declarations she publishes, opens to us a door for negotiation, but we persist in those measures which have brought us to the brink of ruin, refuse even to say what the object of the war is, and thus, as though pride and obstinacy had driven us mad, and rendered us regardless of the miseries of our species, and of all that is dear to ourselves, as men and as Britons we unite and irritate a formidable enemy already too much enraged.

And why all this? Is the war in which we are engaged a war in defence of our dearest rights, liberties, and interests; or is it the war of continental kings and priests, against the rights and liberties of mankind? Is it a war, not only to subjugate the French and divide their territory, but, to intimidate all other nations from imitating their resistance of oppression, and from daring to attempt any thing a-

gainst the will and prerogatives of their sovereigns, or the interest of the established priesthoods: and thus eternally to rivet the chains which bind them; and not only prevent the advancement of mankind to the perfect day of reason and truth; but to plunge them back into that Egyptian darkness, from whence they have been slowly emerging for the three last centuries.

And does the providence of God appear to be fulfilling those predictions which all protestants have long been taught to consider as referring to the final overthrow of papal superstitions, corruptions, and tyrannies? And are *we!*—*protestants!*—a *free and enlightened* people?—engaged as principals in a war, the immediate tendency of which, if successful, is to keep popery and priestcraft from falling, and to support idolatry, persecution, and despotism? Tell it not in Gath! A greater crime, or a more dangerous undertaking, cannot be imagined! Without a speedy change of measures, how will the people be able to forgive those who have betrayed their king and country into so dishonourable and perilous a situation?

And do we, my countrymen, see the errors and dangers of this war, so rashly begun, and so obstinately persisted in? and do we apprehend it to be unjust and impious in the extreme, as well as dangerous to the liberty and peace of mankind in general, and to ours in particular, and yet hold our peace, without doing what the laws of our country make it our duty to do, and assure us of protection in doing; without exerting ourselves to the utmost to put an end to it? Whence our silence? Have the creatures of corruption succeeded so far as to affright us from all love of liberty, from all respect to justice, and from all regard to our own and our children's welfare? Are we too supine, and indifferent, and cowardly, even to lift up our voice a-

gainst the enemies of mankind, for the salvation of our country, and for the rescue of liberty and truth from the hands of assassins? If so, sin lieth at our door; we are the accomplices of the greater criminals, and must expect to share in the general retribution.

And here, my countrymen, let me put in one word respecting that political reform (a reform in the representation of the people especially), which is essential to the preservation of our dearest rights, and to averting from us unspeakable evils. If we have no hope of this desirable reform, where does the blame lie? Does it not lie with the people? Have we used the means which the constitution prescribes? Some few societies have presented addresses and petitions on this head; but the mass of the people have been silent, or only murmured in secret without exertion. Let the counties, cities, and towns, and societies in every corner of the land, assemble and express their wish for a thorough reform; and in a style which the vast importance of the subject demands, and we may then hope to see an effectual and peaceable one take place, and not tremble for the direful consequences of a revolution.—It has been said, that it is not to be expected that corruption will reform itself. Let us hope that this argument is more specious than solid. Though the corrupt may not *voluntarily* reform themselves, yet I cannot help believing, that if the great body of the people were to express themselves firmly, though respectfully, on this subject, it would be attended to, and our country would be saved from ten thousand evils which will otherwise come upon it.—I repeat it. If we have no reform, does not the fault lie with the people? We are perpetually sighing forth our wishes, and pouring forth our murmurings and complaints by our fire-sides, and in every little social circle, when we ought to assemble and make them heard where only our grievances can be redressed

without mischief. This supineness must have a cause; that cause, I fear, is extremely criminal.—But it is time to bring to a conclusion these afflicting inquiries

True, the national sins which we have been considering are, compared with what might be brought forward, but few; yet these are sufficient to humble us in our own esteem, and to convince all considerate people that the consequences of this singular war, which appears to tend to no common issue, are much to be feared—But, alas! how insensible are the generality both of the nature and magnitude of our sins, and of the imminence of our danger! With all this guilt that lies upon us, like those of old, who amused themselves with the mummery of hypocrisy, we say, “Peace, peace, the temple of the Lord are we.” Forgetting the denunciations against proud Tyre, the merchant city, and the judgments by which she was overthrown (Isa. xxiii. Ezek. xxvii. xxviii.), we say, “Desolations may sweep the earth, but our sea girt isle is safe from the destruction. Our navy is invincible. Our seat is in the midst of the seas, and we shall see no sorrow.”—Infatuated people! Thy rowers have brought thee into great waters. He who broke Tyre, in the midst of the seas, has other Nebuchadnezzars, other Alexanders, and other tempests to break thee also. Humiliation and repentance become so sinful a nation as this, and not haughtiness and confidence; to deprecate the divine judgments from ourselves, and not to imprecate vengeance on others, is our duty. Nothing but repentance, and a speedy reformation, both moral and political, can afford us any well-grounded hope of a long continuance of safety:

What reasons are there for fearing that our violent dealings will soon come down upon our own heads! The hope of carrying slaughter and famine through France has afforded joy to thousands. How many,

in this Christian land, have been enough lost to the feelings of humanity, to wish success to the attempts which have been made to starve the whole French nation, man, woman, and child. We are an enlightened people, and call ourselves Christians, the disciples of Him whose doctrine teaches, "If thine enemy hunger, feed him;" but the war system, which has so long been cherished, has taught us to mingle, with the humanity of civilization, a ferocity worthy of barbarians. My heart recoils at the objects of horror which start upon my imagination at the very recollection of this inhuman project, though now abandoned in despair. There is *now* but a step between *us* and famine; and the barriers seem breaking down to lay us open to the invasion of an enraged enemy. Should these evils be realized,—which God forbid!—how will it imbitter our reflections, in the midst of sufferings and death, to recollect our former wishes and rejoicings; when our prayers are nothing but imprecations of destruction on our enemies; and our joys in proportion to the multitudes of the slain, the numbers made widows and fatherless, and the quantum of devastation and misery.—Yes, we are a guilty people, and it cannot be repeated too often, that nothing but a speedy repentance, personal and national; nothing but a thorough reformation, political and moral, can give us any hope of a long security from calamities the most awful.—“Behold the Judge standeth before the door.”

More than two years ago I ventured to publish my opinion that the prophecies, which refer to the final overthrow of all antichristian oppressions and corruptions were beginning to be accomplished, and that the prediction (Rev. xi. 18.) respecting the anger of the nations, and the wrath of God, was verifying; and that the first vial of wrath (Rev. xvi. 2.) was begun to be poured out (Signs of the Times); and though I am no prophet, and may be mistaken,

yet I hope I may be permitted, without being accused of presumption, to give my opinion as to the progress which I suppose these judgments have made, and what we have to expect. Hitherto the vial on the earth appears to have prevailed; but now there are striking indications of the speedy pouring out of that which is allotted for the sea (Rev. xvi. 3.). Does this prophetic representation allude to the judgments of God which are to fall on maritime powers, on navies, and on insular countries? Every thing looks like the approach of its accomplishment. Are the French the instruments which God is using for the chastisement of the nations, and for the accomplishment of his purposes? Hitherto they have been obliged to exert their force in other quarters; but Providence seems loosing them from their former restraints, and it is probable that, making peace with some of their continental enemies, they will be at liberty to bend their force more immediately against this country, and to exert all their power for the destruction of our navy. This struggle for naval pre-eminence, and for the overthrow of our government, will, it is likely, turn the sea into blood, and bring upon this country more dreadful evils than it has ever yet known.—On subjects like these diffidence and modesty become us. Even though the hypothesis, founded on the above passage, be just, viz. that this country will be the next to experience the awful visitation of God, yet it may be brought about in ways the least thought of. Even when events may be pretty clearly revealed, yet the manner of their accomplishment may be no part of the revelation, and the methods of Providence may disappoint all our best formed conjectures. But however these things may be, yet that some afflicting change in our situation will soon take place, that some calamity, dreadfully awful, will soon burst upon this country; every thing indicates. “ Prepare there-

fore to meet your God."—" Behold I come as a thief Watch."

Over the conduct of the nation the influence of a few individuals is but small. It is indeed the duty of every man to do all he can towards producing, on the public mind, that conviction which must precede genuine repentance, and which is necessary to any valuable or effectual reform; but after all he may fail and the ruin of his country may be inevitable. But should it be thus, yet if he has not been wanting in those duties which he owes to society, to himself, and his God; if he has examined his own ways, and turned from his evil doings, he may still hope for some shelter from the violence of the desolating storm; and though he may not escape all share of sufferings amidst God's judgments on the nations, yet he may be accounted worthy to escape the chief evil of them, and to stand before the Son of Man. Let each of us, therefore, not forget to watch over ourselves; over our principles, tempers, and conduct.

Though benevolence will influence us to care for others, and inspire our hearts with the love of our country, the love of our kind; yet our own religion, our own virtue and piety, to watch over ourselves, is our particular concern. Let us then beware that our hearts are not overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life. Let us take heed, and watch over ourselves, that we be not conformed to the follies and ungodly practices of the world; but that we be transformed by the renewing of our minds, and thus be found vigilant and active in practising those duties which our Lord has enjoined, that, come when he will, he may find us ready. And seeing that God's judgments are now pouring out upon antichrist in no common measure, and threatening the accomplishment of the long predicted destruction, it becomes us particular-

ly to watch over ourselves, and beware that we are not amongst his advocates and supporters, for that would be to insure a share of that wrath which is to destroy him ;—it becomes us to see that we are not among the persecutors, who beat their fellow servants, and riot on the spoil of their lord's house; for the lord of such servants shall come in a day when they look not for him, and in an hour that they are not aware of, and shall cut them asunder, and appoint them their portion with the hypocrites ; but blessed is that servant whom his lord, when he cometh, shall find doing what he hath commanded.

But to *watchfulness* add *prayer*. *Pray always*.—What is it which this command of Christ enjoins us more particularly to pray for ?

As the advancement and glory of the kingdom of God should be our chief end, so our prayers, before all things, should be for this. Thus the first petition in that pattern of prayer, which our Lord taught his disciples, is, *Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*. Shall we pray for our daily bread ? Shall we pray for the forgiveness of our sins, and be fervent in prayer for what concerns our own particular interests, and shall we be unconcerned about the glory of God ? Great and many are the promises which the divine Father hath given to us, respecting his kingdom among men ; respecting the universal dominion of his Son ; let us pray then that this kingdom may come ; that the knowledge of the Lord may cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea ; with David, in his last prayer, let us pray, *let the whole earth be filled with his glory, Amen and Amen*.

It is also the duty of the Christian, to pray for the overthrow of all the enemies of Christ, and for the removal of every thing which stands in opposition to his kingdom. As for our own particular enemies, we are enjoined to pray for them, and to bless them

that curse us; but with respect to the incorrigible enemies of God and of his church, though the Christian is never to take the vengeance into his own hands, yet he is taught to pray, *Let all thine enemies perish, O Lord, let all them be confounded that hate Zion:* and we are called upon to rejoice over the fall of antichristian persecutors, who have shed the blood of the saints. Respecting the whore of Babylon, who is drunk with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus, and all her children who oppose the dominion of the prince of peace, it is the duty of the followers of the Lamb to pray, *How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood? Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered!*

And whilst Christians exercise faith in the promise of their master, and look for his coming, it is their duty to pray that the church of Christ may be stirred up to her first love, and to do her first works. Truly it is a day of small things. With all our boastings of being the most pure and best constituted church in the world; with all our professions of religion, and millions a-year paid for its support, how little of true piety! how little of sound morality! Yea, how little do people in general know even of the first rudiments of our holy religion! Instead of the fear of God, we take up with superstition; instead of that spirit of love which the gospel makes so indispensable, we see little but grudging and ill-will between different parties; and our zeal is rather for forms and opinions of human invention, than for genuine godliness: or, at best, about mint, anise, and cummin, rather than the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith. Nor is this departure from primitive Christianity peculiar to one or two sects. It is general. Without a change, what have we to expect but the fate of the Jewish church; the fate of those Scribes and Pharisees whom we every day condemn?—The clouds have

already begun to darken our hemisphere—they roll towards us—they groan with the weight of vengeance which they bear.

Amidst this general declension and corruption; this lamentable departure from the spirit and practice of Christianity; what duty is more incumbent on the true servant of God, or more in unison with his feelings, than to pray that God would revive his work; and to that end pour out the influences of his spirit upon his people; send forth labourers into his vineyard, and bless, in his church, the dispensation of his word, and the administration of Christian ordinances; that thus the Christian church may be ready to meet her Lord, as a bride adorned for her husband? None.

We add, it is also our bounden duty, in prospect of the great and terrible day of the Lord's judgments on the nations, to pray for our country, that we may find mercy amidst those great and general calamities which are to clear the way for Christ's kingdom. It is our duty to pray *for the king and for all in authority*, that God, in his all-directing providence, would over-rule and guide all their councils and proceedings for good; and that the government under which we live and enjoy so many blessings, and under whose protection the church of Christ, in these lands, has been sheltered for now *a hundred and five years*, from those persecutions which laid it waste in preceding ages, and which have, at the same time, laid it waste in other neighbouring nations, may be blessed, and be still directed for the general good, *that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives*; that what is amiss may be corrected; that whatever may be offensive to God, and injurious to men, may be speedily reformed. And to the end that this may be done with the least possible calamity, our duty is to pray that God will be pleased to dispose the hearts of our rulers, in whose hands the power of reformation is,

to apply themselves to it with all the zeal and disinterested integrity which the vast importance of the case requires. And above all, our fervent prayer to God should be, that a sincere and general repentance and turning from sin may take place among us. For whatever crooked policy may teach, it is righteousness only that exalteth a nation, and sin that brings reproach on any people (Prov. xiv. 34.). This it is which works, as a canker, the ruin of empires, and brings upon nations the vengeance of Almighty God, who, as the righteous Sovereign and Governor over all, lifteth up one and casteth down another, and rendereth to nations, as well as to individuals, according to their works: but with this difference, that whereas rewards and punishments, as they respect individuals, are to be expected rather in the world to come than in this, those which nations may merit must be in this life; because, as nations, they can have no future existence. And hence, though wicked individuals may here escape punishment, wicked nations, first or last, never do; but, when their iniquity is full (Gen. xv. 16.), the vengeance comes, and they tumble into ruin. That we may repent, and be preserved from God's destroying judgments, let us *pray always*.

The prayer of faith availeth much: Abraham prayed to the Lord that if but ten righteous persons were found in Sodom, to spare it for the ten's sake; and the Lord promised him, that if so many were found there, he would spare it for the ten's sake. When Israel sinned, Moses prayed for them, and the Lord turned away from his anger. Elias prayed, and there was no rain for three years and six months; and again he prayed, and the Lord sent rain. Prayer has opened gates of iron, and raised the dead. The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous; his ears are open to their cry. The prayer of the upright is his delight. No Christian then, however mean, or obscure

his station (for the Lord is no respecter of persons), can tell but his fervent prayer may avail, to bring blessings on his country, blessings on the church. Happy is the nation that abounds with praying souls! and those governors who, in the fear of God, protect such, may hope for the divine favour. But of oppressors and persecutors we may adopt the language of the psalmist—*Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies, thy right hand shall find out all those that hate thee.*

But it is not only our duty to pray for our own country, but for all nations, Jews and Gentiles; that there may be peace in all the earth; that all may know the Lord, and thus the wilderness and the solitary place be made glad, and the desert blossom as the rose.

Yes, it is our duty to pray for *all* nations; and we very much mistake the nature of our religion, and are ignorant of the very essential of acceptable prayer, if we fancy that we may approach the Almighty with hearts burning with wrath, even against our bitterest enemies, and with prayers for their destruction: An universal benevolence must expand our minds and warm our devotions, if we would offer an acceptable sacrifice on his altar. God has made of one blood all the nations of the earth, and for the conversion, peace, liberty, and happiness of all, should we be concerned. Our father, who is in heaven, is kind to the unthankful and the evil, and to imitate him is not only the perfection of piety, but essential to its existence. O when will the time come that we shall all learn the lessons of Jesus Christ! Desirable day!—long promised and long prayed for, when all the tribes of the earth shall remember and turn unto the Lord; when, actuated and united by the kindly influence of christian charity, all nations shall embrace each other as brethren, and we shall no more hear of *natural* enemies; of *religious* wars

(as the present one is called) nor of any other ; but, “ Judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and nothing but righteousness in the fruitful field. And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness, and assurance for ever.” (Isa. xxxii. 16. 17.). To many, such a state of felicity, in this world, may appear to be only the reverie of a heated fancy ; but though we cannot say with exactness, *how* society will be brought to this happy state ; yet why should it be thought so very chimerical as some suppose it ? It only needs that the great mass of mankind should be enlightened by the wisdom of the gospel, and feel its influence on their minds ; that all governments should be formed on the broad principles of justice and benevolence, and not, as is now too generally the case, on blind selfishness, and the criminal policy of statesmen and priests, who have created to themselves an interest distinct from that of the majority of mankind. Were men thus enlightened, and governments thus constituted, universal peace and happiness would follow of course. And has God created all nations for his glory, and that he might have objects on which to exercise his infinite beneficence ? Has He, in conformity to those hopes which He cherished from age to age, of a perfect recovery from the evils of the fall, sent forth his Son into the world to shed his blood for the remission of sins, and thus far forwarded the progress of the promised redemption ? Has He raised him from the dead, set him at his own right hand, and promised to him “ dominion and glory, and a kingdom that all people, nations, and languages may serve him ?” (Dan. vii. 14.). And do innumerable promises glitter in the prophecies, which, to say the least, seem to encourage our hopes of those happy days on this now distracted earth, when “ nation shall not lift up sword against nation, nor learn war any more ?”

(Mic. iv. 3. 4.) And do we believe not only that God is able to effect the necessary changes on the minds of men, and the necessary order of things in the nations; but that it is a work worthy of his infinite goodness? Why then should any, who believe the scriptures, esteem this expectation of universal righteousness and harmony among men as ill-founded; or even the speedy accomplishment of the event, as at all improbable?

Christians! do you believe the prophets? Yes, I know that you believe. Search the scriptures then, for they assure us of a time when all shall know the Lord, and the nations of the earth shall learn war no more; but disbanded armies shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks, (Isa. ii. 4.) and, as the subjects of one sovereign, the prince of peace; as the children of one father, the father of mercies; all men shall dwell together in love, and no more stain his house with each others blood, nor disturb his family with their broils*. As christians it is our duty to pray for this general felicity of all nations, and do all we can to promote it.—Woe unto us if we are willing instruments to hinder it.—And though we cannot hope to see its full accomplishment at once, yet as feeling for the sufferings, and participating in the happiness of all nations, let us not cease to pray for their welfare, and that the God of all grace, the common father of us all, as his creatures, would over-rule all their affairs, in common with

* May peace bless my country and all mankind! But though I may be mistaken, yet, from a diligent comparison of the prophecies with events, I have formed a strong persuasion that the present war will continue to rage in Europe, with little or no intermission, for about twenty-four years to come, and, except the short and violent push which Gog and his host will make just before the closing of the present dispensation, or order of things, will be the last. The reasons which support this hypothesis may be seen in the *First Part of the Signs of the Times*.

those of our own country, for the furtherance of the moral improvement, and of the general union and happiness of mankind.

To conclude, our duty, in the prospect of the coming of the Lord, is, to pray that *we* may be prepared; that our tempers and practices may be brought to a holy conformity to the principles of the kingdom of Jesus Christ; that we may not be found among the lordly and persecuting; that we may not be found among those that sleep, nor among the scoffers that say, *Where is the promise of his coming?* but among those that watch and pray always, and who shall be accounted worthy to escape the judgments which shall fall upon the heads of the wicked, and to stand before the Son of Man.

O christians! how is it that we watch and pray no more? that we are no more concerned to glorify our Lord, and to be found of him in peace? What is it, christian, which engages your attention? which occupies your time? Christ has promised to come again, and take to himself his kingdom. How is it that you think no more about it? that you pray no more for it? that you watch the signs which he has given us with no more attention, nor over yourselves with no more godly jealousy? How is it that you are no more concerned to be ready? Is this your faith in one of the most interesting truths which the word of God reveals? *Alas! When the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?* But few, it is to be feared, will be found exercising faith on the particular promise of his coming; but that day will come upon us unawares.

O ye, whose hearts are overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, who live in chambering and wantonness; and ye men of the earth, whose hearts are overcharged with the cares of this life, and who would rather that the kingdom of God should never come, than your ease be disturbed, or your carnal

interests affected: Ye, who are too busy about this world, to think of another; too much in love with the present state of things, to sigh after the promised change; too earthly minded, to watch the signs of the times, or to realize the promises of Christ! He shall come at an hour that ye think not. At midnight there shall be a cry, *Go ye out to meet him.* At any rate the period is not far off when death will summon you into eternity. It is not long ere the trumpet will sound and we must all stand before the Son of Man, and receive as our works have been. *Be ye ready.*

O ye nations! ye nations! prepare to meet your God. He cometh in his power, to rejudge the cause of the dead. He will break his enemies with a rod of iron, and dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel. Then ye servants of God, ye afflicted followers of Christ, look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh.

HE THAT TESTIFIETH THESE THINGS SAITH,
SURELY I COME QUICKLY, AMEN. EVEN SO, COME
LORD JESUS.

F I N I S.



